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ABSTRACT

Three hundred ninety female freshmen who had career interests that were traditional, nontraditional, or neutral for women were compared on encouragement to pursue career goals, Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores, college grade-point average (GPA), persistence in original major, and persistence at the university after four semesters. In addition, 309 males who entered the university as freshmen at the same time were included in the study. Results showed that women with nontraditional goals received less encouragement in high school to pursue these goals but had higher SAT scores than other women. No significant differences were found in GPAs, persistence in original major, or persistence at the university among the women in the study. Compared to men with career interests traditional for men, nontraditional women received more encouragement to pursue their career interests, had lower Math SAT scores and higher college GPAs but were no different on Verbal SATs or persistence in their major or at the university. Men and women with interests in engineering were also compared. The only difference was that the females reported more encouragement to pursue their goals. Results suggested these recommendations: the expending of more resources to identify and encourage nontraditional women and more specific counseling programs for nontraditional women. (YLB)

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A LONGITUDINAL COMPARISON OF TRADITIONAL AND NONTRADITIONAL CAREER CHOICES BY SEX

Ellen Boullé Lauria, William E. Sedlacek & Michael Waldo

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SUMMARY

Three hundred ninety freshmen women who had career interests which were traditional, nontraditional or neutral for women (Kingdon and Sedlacek, 1982) were compared on encouragement to pursue career goals, SAT scores, UMCP GPA's after four semesters, persistence in original major after four semesters, and persistence at UMCP after four semesters. 309 Males who entered UMCP as freshmen at the same time were also included in the study. Results showed that women with nontraditional goals received less encouragement in high school to pursue these goals but had higher SAT scores than other women. There were no significant differences in UMCP GPA's, persistence in original major (about 2/3 in the same major), or persistence at UMCP after four semesters (/6% were still in school) among the women in the study.

Compared to men with career interests traditional for men (same careers which are nontraditional for women), nontraditional women received more encouragement to pursue their career interests, had lower Math SAT scores and higher college GPA's, but were no different on Verbal SAT's or persistence in their majors or at UMCP after four semesters. Men (N=63) and women (N=42) with interests in engineering were also compared, and no differences were found on Math or Verbal SAT scores, GPA after four semesters, or persistence in major or persistence at UMCP after four semesters. However, females with engineering goals reported more encouragement to pursue those goals than did males with engineering goals. Implications for counselors and advisors were discussed.

A LONGITUDINAL COMPARISON OF TRADITIONAL AND NONTRADITIONAL CAREER CHOICES BY SEX

More women are coming to college for vocational or career-related reasons. Mason-Sowell and Sedlacek (1983) found that over a 13-year period, the percentage of women entering college for vocational reasons increased from 28% to 35%, while the rate for men remained at 44%. Kingdon and Sedlacek (1982) compared women entering college as new freshmen who had career choices which were nontraditional for women (e.g., physician, biochemist, 42%), traditional for women (e.g., nurse, teacher, 14%), or neutral (22%), based on 1980 United States Department of Labor data on percentages of women in occupations. Twenty-one percent of their sample had no career goal. Kingdon and Sedlacek found that the nontraditional group had higher high school grades, better study habits, and more interest in graduate school and investigative occupations, while the traditional group was more interested in social occupations and said that a college degree was the only way they could enter their chosen career. The neutral group felt weakest in math and tended to choose artistic careers. At the same university, Knight, Sedlacek and Bachhuber (1983) reported that women bachelor's degree recipients were largely employed in areas that have been traditional for them. The apparent discrepancy between women entering college with nontraditional career goals but accepting traditional positions upon graduating raises many important questions for counselors, advisors, and educators. What happens to these women with nontraditional goals as they proceed through school? Do they change to traditional majors? Do they remain in nontraditional majors, but resign themselves to traditional jobs upon graduation? Should counselors encourage women to pursue nontraditional fields? Or prepare them for the realities of the job market?

The purpose of the present study was to attempt to answer the above and related questions by continuing to study the group of students reported in Kingdon and Sedlacek, and to compare them to men with traditionally male majors.

Method

Of the 530 women reported in Kingdon and Sedlacek (1982), the 79% (N=419; 390 final usable N due to missing data) who indicated a career goal (42% nontraditional, 14% traditional and 22% neutral, i.e., neither traditional nor nontraditional) were included in the present study. Also included were 309 male students who entered the university as freshmen at the same time as the 530 women. Eighty-seven percent of the males had traditionally male career interests, while only 2% had interest in traditionally female careers.

The subgroups were compared with respect to encouragement to pursue goals, SAT scores, college GPA after four semesters, persistence in original major after four semesters, and persistence at the university after four semesters. Data were analyzed by Chi-square or analysis of variance at the .05 level.

Results

Differences Among Women

Women with nontraditional goals received less encouragement to pursue those goals in high school than women in traditional or neutral goals. Nontraditional women had higher SAT scores than traditional or neutral women. There were no significant differences in college GPA after four semesters, persistence in original major after four semesters (about 2/3 were in the original major), or persistence in school after four semesters (76% were still in school).

Nontraditional Women and Traditional Men

Compared to men with career interests traditional for men (same careers which are nontraditional for women), nontraditional women received more

encouragement to pursue their career interests, had lower Math SAT scores and higher college GPA's, but were not different on Verbal SAT scores or persistence in their major or remaining at the same school after four semesters.

Men (N=63) and women (N=42) with interests in engineering also were compared, and no differences were found on Math or Verbal SAT scores, GPA after four semesters, or persistence in school after four semesters. However, females with engineering goals reported more encouragement to pursue these goals than did males with engineering goals.

Discussion

The results indicate that, after two years, nontraditional women are persisting in high school and in their nontraditional fields. They are doing as well as their traditional female counterparts in GPA's and persistence in school. However, nontraditional women are getting higher GPA's than traditional men, and persisting in their majors and in school as well as traditional men. Interestingly, when specific major was controlled, male and female engineering students were indistinguishable in all ways examined (including Math SAT and college GPA) except that women reported more encouragement to pursue their goals. So we know that nontraditional women are not leaving school or switching majors more than other students. We also know that nontraditional women report more encouragement to pursue nontraditional interests than traditional men, but less than traditional women. While we are not sure what career choice problems this group of nontraditional women will face in their next two semester in school, we can make some good estimates from the literature and our experience. The pressure to choose more traditional majors will increase. As women pursue nontraditional majors and become more specialized, however, their flexibility to shift to traditional fields will decrease. Harmon (1972, 1981) found that women tend to select nontraditional careers

in their teens, but then shift to more traditional areas in their twenties. She feels this is due to a lack of environmental support to remain nontraditional.

Here the role of counselors and advisors is particularly crucial. The present study provides evidence that nontraditional women tend to persist in their fields through four semesters, and the writers feel that they deserve to be met and helped further along their chosen paths. Nontraditional women report less encouragement than their traditional female counterparts; perhaps they need less; but a university committed to the education and development of women cannot leave this to chance. It is suggested that more resources be expended in identifying and encouraging nontraditional women.

Academic advisors may need to be more initiating with their nontraditional advisees, so the advisees have the information and support they need. Counselors also could provide more specific programming, such as groups or counselor outreach and training programs to serve this group. One important aspect of such counseling programs concerns the attitudes of men and women toward women in nontraditional occupations. Both men and women may be uncomfortable with women in nontraditional fields (Knight and Sedlacek, 1983; Shinar, 1978), which may be a source of much pressure on nontraditional women. It is possible to alter sexist attitudes in college students as early as during freshmen orientation programs (Sedlacek, Troy & Chapman, 1975). Career Development and placement staff could make extra efforts to provide programs which are tailored to the needs of women with nontraditional majors. Such efforts could mean the difference between nontraditional women continuing to resist pressures and entering and helping alter traditionally male occupations, or simply blending in with traditionally female roles in society.

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